

GERALDINE IN SWITZERLAND

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY JAMES MONTGOMERY FLAGG

I



GERALDINE'S people lived at North Kensington. They were of no consequence. There were three daughters, all grown up. Edith, the eldest, was engaged to a deaf young man, an accountant or something of that sort; he came every Sunday at half-past one and stayed till a quarter to eleven. Geraldine told her sister quite frankly that he was a freak, and her contempt was obvious to every one but the object of it. She herself was the second daughter. The third, Ada, had a queer little treble voice, a perpetual smile, and yellow hair. She practiced a great deal on the piano and was supposed to be pretty. Geraldine frequently longed to shake her, and regretted that a favorable opportunity did not occur.

The means of the Lawton family were limited. Edith considered that household matters and the entertainment of Mr. Morris (the accountant young man), together with the contemplation of her future

position at Brondesbury and the arrangement of a possible villa there, were sufficient to occupy her. Ada occasionally gave a few music lessons, rather as a favor and in a depreciating manner, to young ladies of the Notting Hill district: she heard of them usually at the circulating library.

Geraldine, tall and slim and pale, with a spice of humor in her dark eyes and a streak of red here and there in her dark hair, was a disturbing quantity in the family. She laughed at many of its ways, and was openly impatient of them; to the astute observer it would have been evident that in the near future a crisis would come about. It did—when it occurred to the Lawton family to take as paying guests a couple of thin and elderly spinster cousins, whose mother had lately retired gratefully to Kensal Green. They were surprised at Geraldine, and, being relations, considered that they had a right to explain their views concerning her (in confidence, of course,) to other members of the family. She was told of them (also in confidence) and, since she did not see her way to throwing things at

the ladies, was irritated. One night she walked in from the dressing-room, in which she slept alone, to the large one with two beds allotted to her sisters.

"Girls," she said, "I'm tired of this, and mean to get out of it."

Edith was trying on a lace collar before the glass. "Oh!" she said without being much interested.

Ada, who was brushing her hair, looked up. "What do you mean?" she asked.

Ada felt as if she were being reproached, and began—"Well, I've earned seventeen pounds this year——"

"I'm not talking about you, but about myself."

"I shouldn't think of doing anything," Edith exclaimed. "Mother couldn't manage the house without me, and Charlie wants to be married next spring."

"And we're not even discussing you, my dear," Geraldine remarked with sisterly



The crossing was horrible.—Page 227.

"What I say. Lots of girls are bachelors nowadays. I shall take rooms somewhere and trim hats or set up a typewriting office—do something anyway."

"You can't!" One girl said it, the other thought it.

"I can learn. I'm not a fool—I've always done my own hats. If I were pretty enough, I'd go on the stage." Her sisters made no remark. "I can't stand those two old cats any longer, and I'm tired of the life here; there's nothing in it. Besides, I don't think it right for three of us to live on the parents. I shall clear out for one."

candor. "I'm just explaining that I'm not going to stay here any longer. I have some of grandfather's money left, thank goodness"—that amiable gentleman had died a year ago and left the girls a hundred pounds each. "I shall set up with it somehow and get on—you'll see."

She did—and they saw.

Three months later she had learnt how to typewrite, and established herself in a little office two doors from Westbourne Grove. At first she had nothing to do. But she was tall and graceful, there was lurking mischief in her smile, and she had an air of alertness that arrested attention.

Gradually the City gentlemen, who passed on the tops of omnibuses, became aware of it—they saw her arrive and open the office door, or depart and close it; and the literary ladies of Westbourne Park had heard of her. The gentlemen dropped in before ten or after five to dictate their letters; she soon grasped their methods and became a valuable typist. The literary ladies thought her sympathetic, and cooed over her. They were a little disappointed when they found that she was inclined to hustle them out of the office and insisted on ready money; but she copied their stories and fashion articles so well that they decided not to withdraw their custom.

In twelve months' time she had two

clerks and a pupil. The pupil had dark frizzy hair and looked like an idiot. Geraldine mentally called her one, for she couldn't spell, and she made the keys of the machine sticky owing to her weakness for nougat; but she did to fill up or to send on errands. The office was a going concern, and the head of it triumphant.

But it was not till the following year that the romance of her life came about. She had paid her rent, raised the salaries of her clerks, satisfied her modest but excellent taste in dress, and saved a little money. When August came, the majority of her customers were away. One of the clerks was at Yarmouth, and the idiot with the parents at Shepherd's Bush, where she was



With an air of not seeing her he took the next table. —Page 228.

entertaining a touch of enteric brought about by drinking unfiltered water. It occurred to Geraldine that the remaining clerk could perfectly well look after the business till September, and that she herself would go to Switzerland. She had never been abroad, but here was a chance. It was possible to go very cheaply, and once you were there the mountains would look the same, no matter how you managed to get to them; and whatever you suffered on the way you would forget all about in six months' time and remember only the places you had seen. So she took a third-class return to Lausanne via Dieppe and Paris. The crossing was horrible, but there were excitements new to her on landing and a French train to climb into. Then she beheld the lovely Normandy land. She whirled through it in the hard-seated truck of a railway carriage; but the outlook from it was the same to her as to the occupant of a Pullman car: being a philosopher she told herself this and rejoiced to think of the small sum she had paid for it. Paris, which she observed for the first time, and only drove across on her way from the Gare St. Lazare to the Gare du Nord, she promptly characterized as a fine city, but stuffy, "though the streets are much better kept than ours," she allowed as an extenuating circumstance. She felt quite impatient to get to Lausanne, where she determined to make her first stop, chiefly because she had read her Byron, "and loved him." "Childe Harold" she considered "a grand thing," and no one, she maintained, who had read "The Prisoner of Chillon" could ever forget it; she remembered hearing that it had been written at Lausanne, and that the room Byron had occupied was still to be seen. Unfortunately, she went to a wrong hotel; it was insufferably hot, and there were two black beetles in the corridor—she would have preferred snakes—so she fled onward by the morning steamer. She got off it at Clarens, remembering that Byron had been there, too—so had Rousseau. She was a little vague about Rousseau. He had written "Confessions," she knew—of what she was uncertain—and she had an idea that his life had not been altogether to his credit; but after she had seen Clarens she would find out all about him.

She deposited her luggage, which con-



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He wondered if she had taken offence.—Page 230.

sisted of a pilgrim basket and a hold-all, at a little restaurant next the landing stage, and went for a walk. For a moment she felt adrift and in doubt as to which way to go. "I suppose one always does," she thought, "but all the same, it's splendid to be alone; no one to worry, and you do as you like." With a touch of superiority she turned away from the dusty road to right and left of her, from the villas and the signs of tourist life and prosperity, and went toward the country at the foot of the great mountains. She adored them already, and walked a little way upward through the vineyards, which she considered distinctly disappointing—"stumpy little bushes, not so picturesque as gooseberries, a hop garden is twice as good"—but the scenery enchanted her. She stopped again and again to look back at the lake and the Dent du Midi, or to sit down on the low stone walls and watch the lizards run about in the sunshine, while she thought how splendid it was, and how wise she had been to come. But raptures are hard to maintain long when you have no definite point to reach and the sun is high in August. "Never felt

anything like it in my life," she gasped, and at noon when, tired and dusty, she returned to the restaurant, a vague wonder unconsciously began to take hold of her as to how she was going to map out her holiday so as to make it a success.

II

THE restaurant was deserted, the dining-room hot and stuffy, and the waiter half asleep; but there was a wide balcony overhanging the lake; a red and white-sun-blind made it shady, and many little white-covered tables were suggestive. She went to one next the balustrade, so as to look down into the clear cool water, and asked for something to eat.

While she was waiting a tall man entered, he was four and thirty, perhaps, fair and loosely jointed, good looking on the whole, and had a leisurely way that was attractive.

With an air of not seeing her he took the next table, as being nearest the lake, perhaps; for there was no one else in the place. The waiter ambled toward him; and in excellent French—for which she envied him, her own was vile—the stranger ordered an omelette, some fish, and a green artichoke. He knew what he was about, she thought, and felt a little resentful at the steak and fried potatoes which had been set before her. It was good enough; she was

too young and too hungry not to enjoy it; but there was more imagination in his repast. She might at least have thought of an omelette she told herself when she saw his, looking extremely good and of a delicate buttercup

color, not two yards away from her.

He and she progressed with their separate luncheons in silence. Except for the soft plash of the water and the occasional dip of an oar the noonday hush was on the lake; but for the coming and going of the waiter, it seemed to have fallen on the little restaurant, too. It emphasized the fact that she was not absolutely alone; but when her sleeve caught a fork and sent it to the ground with a clatter, the stranger might have been deaf and blind. She wondered why he didn't look at her—just once. A man was a fool to sit in the same room with a woman and not to

do that. Of course, no one expected him to speak, but a cat might look at a king. After all, too, she wasn't a fright; she wore a string-colored tussore silk which hung in soft folds and a straw hat with a blue ribbon round it; she knew quite well that she made an agreeable picture.

So did the fair man, for he was not a fool; but he happened to be a gentleman—rather more of one than Edith's accountant young man, for instance.



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One of the curates cast longing glances at her.—Page 231.

She raised her head to look at the patches of misty cloud that touched the mountains, at the water sparkling in the sunshine, at the blue that gathered in the distance, at all the beauty round her; and it, and the glorious fact that she had for once broken away from the life to which she had been born, were altogether too much for her. Moreover, Geraldine had a soul, kept well in order by her usual jaunty exterior, but a soul, nevertheless. For a moment it looked out of her eyes, something gripped her heart; in an unconscious search for sympathy she turned to the fair man.

He was watching her.

Quite forgetting conventionalities, she spoke. "Oh, it's lovely," she said, with a little sigh. Then pulled herself together, and added in a more commonplace tone, "But it's hot."

The last words jarred on him a little, but her voice was pleasant and refined. He looked back at her. She saw that his eyes were very blue.

"Much too hot to stay down here," he said.

"What do you mean?" she asked, eager for knowledge of what people usually did, "Where ought one to go?"

"Anywhere high. I'm going up to Caux."

"Is it much cooler there?"

"I hope so."

"I wonder if it is," she said thoughtfully. "I've never been in Switzerland before and don't know my way about."

He looked at her a little curiously. "Are you all alone?"

"Oh, yes," she answered promptly, and surprised him by adding "it's much nicer."

His gaze wandered, and she saw it, to her left hand; there was no ring of any kind on it. He was becoming interested.

"You like to be free?"

"Rather," she answered, again promptly, but there was nothing forward in her manner, it was perfectly natural and wholly without a suggestion of anything but innocent satisfaction, "it is so good to be unshackled," she had a way of putting postscripts to her remarks.

"Yes, it is—Freedom is the oldest of all the pleasures."

"And the best."

"Perhaps," he answered, in a voice that showed no desire to continue the conversation.

But she was anxious for information. "Caux is only a little way from here?" she asked.

"You go to it from Territet, half a mile along the lake," he nodded in its direction, "it's above Glion."

"Of course," she answered, for she had read her Baedeker with profit.

He looked at her again; she could see that he found it pleasant. "Are you looking for somewhere to settle down?" he asked.

"For a little while."

"You might like it. The hotels are good."

"I must think it over," she said, and turned her chair round so as to face the lake. This man was a stranger, she remembered; she didn't want to strike up an acquaintance; he looked rather nice, but it wasn't the thing to do.

He seemed surprised at her abruptness, ordered some black coffee, paid his bill, and departed. He would have lifted his hat if she had turned her head as he left the balcony, but she appeared to have forgotten him. She hadn't of course, she was saying to herself, "No, I won't go to Caux, he might think I was following him." Still, it was puzzling to know what to do next. Then, for Geraldine had her leanings toward culture of various sorts, she remembered that Professor Tyndall had built a little chalet on Bel Alp, somewhere in the Rhone valley, which began at the end of the lake—on her left. "I'll find out where that chalet is," she thought, "it's sure to be in a beautiful place. I don't suppose they have pulled it down."

She left her luggage at the restaurant and walked through Clarens to Montreux, till she came to the library. There were books and guides and photographs in the shop window. "This is the place to inquire," she thought, "and they'll probably speak English."

She entered, spent a franc, asked some direct questions, and came away with the information that Bel Alp was above Brigue, at the far end of the Rhone valley, and that just below the Tyndall chalet, which was nearly on the summit, there was a good hotel—very high up, of course, and near a splendid glacier.

"I'll go to it," she told herself, "it will be a quite unique thing to do"; for they troubled little about high chalets or glaciers

in Geraldine's set, "no one will ever find me there. Perhaps he thinks I shall go to Caux"—she meant the fair man, of course—"but if he does, he'll find himself mistaken."

She walked on to Territet and inspected the castle at Chillon. "It's well worth seeing," she came to the conclusion, "and the view from it is heavenly. If they had given the prisoner a room with a good window looking toward the head of the lake, he wouldn't have had so much to complain about, and Byron might never have written his poem; it's wonderful how things turn out."

A few minutes from the castle is the starting point for Glion. She had never seen a funicular railway before. It gave her quite a thrill to look up at the almost perpendicular rails laid on the wooded mountain side. "I simply must go there," she exclaimed. "The view will be lovely!"

It was all she expected, and once more she was thoroughly satisfied with herself. She had some coffee—she felt sure the tea would not be good—at another little restaurant with a balcony; the restaurants fascinated her, besides she was rather afraid, at first, of walking into hotels. She felt quite sorry when it was time to go down again and begin the business of travel once more. She had to wait a few minutes for her train and stood contemplating the railway up to Caux and the Rochers de Naye beyond. Suddenly the fair man appeared with a porter carrying two Gladstone bags and a neatly rolled-up railway rug.

She was quite vexed. "Perhaps he thinks I am lying in wait for him"—she almost said it aloud.

But he looked pleased, lifted his hat and hesitated, as if waiting for her to speak. "Oh," she said helplessly, then recovering, added, "I wanted to see Glion. Are you on your way to Caux?"

"Yes—are you coming?"

"No, I'm not," she answered with decision, and took a step toward the starting-point of the downward train.

He went through the turnstile and stood watching her—they were both, of course, in the open air. She looked round with a charming expression on her face; the sky above her and the lake low down behind were bluest blue, they made a setting that was beautiful beyond all words.

"I hope you'll enjoy it," she said; and—how strange these things are—he was fascinated. Her face was a delightful shape; there was humor in her eyes, a smile on her lips, and happiness in her voice. "This was a woman to love, he told himself; why was she going about the world alone?"

She had lingered for a moment. "I wish you were coming," he said.

"I don't want to." She turned away quickly, then looked back again and said, "Good-by."

He wondered if she had taken offence; he had not intended any, though his words were indiscreet. Perhaps it was only that the train had arrived; he watched her slip into it—it went sliding down to Territet. He half regretted having to go to Caux; but he had telegraphed for a room and ordered his letters to be sent there: it was all arranged.

III

GERALDINE gathered up her things, took the train to Brigue, and in the morning started for Bel Alp. The road up to it was atrocious. She hired a porter to carry her luggage; for she told herself that she "couldn't run to a mule." It was farther than she had imagined, it took more than four hours; the stones cut her feet and the zigzags were endless. But she didn't mind; for the fair man came into her thoughts and bore her company; she wished he wouldn't, she tried to imagine that she was bored with him; but he did—and she wasn't: she wished it hadn't been necessary to elude him, and wondered if she would ever see him again.

The hotel was crowded, chiefly with clergymen, which is a peculiarity of the Bel Alp. "I never saw so many in my life," she thought—"and a Bishop, too—well!" There were several elderly ladies, mothers mostly of lean daughters, who went on expeditions with the athletic-looking clericals and stray young men interested in climbing feats.

Geraldine felt a little mild excitement the first evening when she took her place at table. She had put on a white blouse; round her neck she wore a thin gold chain with a singular charm attached to it; she looked dainty and eager, as if she were lying in wait for happiness, but doubtful as

to the form it would take. The assembled guests looked at her critically, they were interested, but no one spoke to her. They carefully avoided anything that might lead to it.

In two days she felt like an alien and didn't quite know what to do with herself. There was the sunrise, of course—she made a point of seeing it; and the sunset, which sent her into the raptures that came rather easily to her. "It makes me feel as if I could kneel down and say some prayers, which I don't do often," she told one of the mothers. The good lady sat outside knitting while her daughters were being convoyed about on the Aletsch glacier by a parson in tweeds with a green veil round his hat. "You ought to say them very often," the matron answered with a kindly smile. It provoked a charming one from Geraldine, and resulted in a few minutes' talk about the weather and places, and a morning and evening salutation.

But that was all.

The people had mostly been there some time and made up their sets; they didn't want to know a stray young woman. The girls realized that she was pretty and considered her in the way; the mothers looked at her askance. She went for various walks and learnt (from maps and guides) the names of the mountain peaks; but they were nothing more than names to her. She walked up to the Tyndall chalet and stood looking at it for a few minutes: it was obviously empty, and she couldn't remember how long it was since he had died, or what precisely he had done. One morning she went down, by the corkscrew way, as it was called, to the glacier, but it wasn't much fun. A happy party from the hotel overtook her—young people of both sexes with a couple of active mothers thrown in—going across to the Eggishorn, with sandwich-boxes and picnic-baskets. They stared, almost as if she were trespassing. She gathered courage, and following them at a distance, ventured on to the glacier and went toward the moraine. But she saw the crevasses and was afraid to go far; the other girls had steps cut in the ice for them, or found strong hands to steady them, but there was no one to help Geraldine.

She went back with her nose in the air and a little unconscious resentment in her heart. She heard there was a wonderful

precipice to see an hour or two off at Nessel; she walked half way there, then felt that she couldn't be bothered with it. A great tea-party was made up to go to it one afternoon, but she was not included. One of the curates cast longing glances at her as they departed, then looked as if he remembered a text, and turned away. A sandy-haired girl with a freckled complexion walked beside him. "I know he would rather have had me," Geraldine said to herself. "They are a set—and I wish I was back in the office. The fact is, everything was meant to be done by two people—not by one alone—that's why Eve was made, and every woman should remember it"—she thought of the fair man and wished that—but no—for, after all, she knew nothing about him. "But I shall go away to-morrow," she exclaimed.

She always came to a quick decision, so she went to the Bureau and announced her intention. Then, with infinite relief in her mind, she walked a quarter of a mile on the downward path, thinking that conventionality was a nuisance. "I daresay we should have amused each other if I had gone to Caux, and there would have been no harm in it at all. But, of course, one has to play up to the proprieties."

Things happen strangely, for almost as she thought it she saw coming toward her a mule carrying two bags and a neatly rolled-up railway rug; a few steps behind was the stranger of the restaurant. It was no good trying to hide it, the relief was so great that she laughed for joy. He saw it and laughed back again. She recovered in a moment and put on a distant air with her pleasant nod of recognition.

"Are you coming to stay?" she asked.

"Just for a night or two," he answered.

"I've been here a week. I'm going away to-morrow—and am counting the hours."

He looked toward the wonderful chain of snowy Alps. "But it is so magnificent," he said.

"Oh, yes," she answered, "but wait till you've seen the people. There are thousands of parsons, and most of the women are cats—I've hardly spoken to a soul since I came——"

"Did you come for the people?"

The color rose to her face. He realized again that she could be charming; his heart reached out to her; he determined

not to let her go without seeing more of her if he could help it.

"No," she answered, "of course not; but they look at me as if I were a freak." Then suddenly a thought struck her. "I don't believe you'll get in," she said. "The hotel is quite full, you'd better go and see." She turned away abruptly, as she had done at the restaurant and the Caux station—he was used to it by this time—and continued her walk. She had remembered that, though she had thought of him many times, they had only met twice before.

At dinner she found that her place was next his; she reflected with satisfaction that this was the first time he had seen her without a hat, and she knew that the white blouse suited her.

"I'm glad to have someone to speak to," she said, forgetting to disguise her pleasure, "but I don't know what they'll think." She lowered her voice while she said the last words; it almost made for intimacy.

"Couldn't we pretend to be old acquaintances?"

"But we are not."

"Some people are meant to be friends, though they won't recognize the fact if they can help it. Don't you think we were?"

"Perhaps."

"Suppose we have the benefit of the doubt?" He turned his face toward her; she noticed again the blueness of his eyes.

"It will be more amusing than saying nothing," she said. "But we don't know anything about each other."

"We have at least that attraction."

"Is it one?"

"Don't you think that a little mystery always is? Let us have our coffee outside presently and look at the eternal snows while we discuss it." They could see the whiteness through the windows. "Do you despise me for saying eternal snows? It sounds like a sentimental penny-a-liner."

Geraldine's wits were quick. "Do you write books?" she asked.

"Sometimes. But I don't get a penny a line because no one reads them."

"Oh! What are they about?"

"Sometimes they are about philosophy."

She made a little grimace. "Do you do anything else?"

"I have an unimportant position in a Government office—"

A man on his other side asked if he had

just come up, and whether there was any news, and entered into an intermittent talk that was reluctant on the stranger's side, but not to be wholly avoided. Geraldine was indignant; no one had spoken to her. Why should he be taken up immediately and she boycotted?

People hurried outside after dinner. "Do come," he said, "there are some sunset clouds about still." He rose and waited for her.

They went to a little table somewhat apart from the others and, when the coffee was brought, Geraldine had a pleasant sense of being really abroad, of feeling continental, as she called it. And she was happy; the whole world had changed. The people who had obviously sniffed at her the last few days realized as she passed that she had her moments of being beautiful. They tried to sniff still, of course. "That girl," as the women called her, had found some one she knew—and the man looked like a gentleman, which rather annoyed them—but who and what was he? One of them tried the visitor's book; but the stranger had not entered his name. The parsons, who thought they remembered him, that he had been senior or junior to them, felt that he was all right and that it might lead to their knowing the girl; she was uncommonly pretty; if she had been plainer they might have spoken to her before, but—well, there was the Bishop: he sat at the head of the table and one had to be careful. And they were glad she had found some one she knew, and the chap was in luck to come upon her.

IV

THEIR talk was quite impersonal at first, he had been to the Bel Alp before and knew all the routes and walks. He pointed out the various mountains and told her of out-of-the-way places; it was wonderful how many he had been to, she thought. She told him about the Eggishorn party, and how she had stopped short at the moraine.

"I don't see why we shouldn't go across it—to the Eggishorn—to-morrow," he said. "Let me take you."

"But I'm going away."

"Is it absolutely necessary?"

"No—" and she hesitated.

"Then why not stay? We haven't been

introduced; but we live outside a Bab bal-lad." He leant forward a little. "Does it matter so much—surely we know——?"

"Yes, we know," she echoed. There was more feeling than was necessary in her voice; she wondered how it had come there, and tried to cover the situation by adding quickly, "Or we might go to Nessel?" which only made it worse. "But I should be afraid to look over the precipice."

"I would take care of you."

"It's a long way," she demurred.

"Not more than an hour or two, and you walk like Diana—I watched you this afternoon."

"Do you mean of 'The Crossways'?" for Geraldine had read her Meredith.

"No, some one much farther back than she, and more beautiful." He said the last words in a whisper.

"I don't like compliments." She made the little abrupt movement that he was beginning to dread.

"What time shall we start for the Eggishorn?" he asked hurriedly.

"I don't know. Breakfast is at nine—but I didn't say that I was going. It's getting chilly," she got up.

"Let me get you a shawl—it's a pity to go indoors."

The twilight was coming, the after-dinner group on the little plateau had dispersed in various directions, in twos mostly—why not they?

"I left one in the Bureau this afternoon," she said and felt it to be a concession.

He went to the house; she watched him and counted his long strides—he was made to run after a Diana, she thought. He returned with a little white wrap. It was becoming and Geraldine knew it—a woman who charms always knows. He put it on her. They were no longer strangers.

There was a curving pathway on the left, they went round it in silence, and disappeared away from any sign of the hotel, and beyond all sounds that belonged to it. They felt, he and she alike, as if they were walking back through the centuries. The world had probably looked like this when it began, before any horrid houses were built, or tourists invented, and when there were no conventionalities to worry about. There must have been the same bareness of vegetation—rocks and stones—and white

peaks then too—the great chain of mountains that looked eternal and infinite—the cold caressing air—everything, as it was now, in the first twilight of all, when one man and woman walked alone. For a moment she felt as if she knew, as if she remembered, she pretended that she did, then brought herself back to the present with a jerk. "I wonder why we live in cities and towns," she said, "with streets and noises and crowds of hurrying people."

"I don't."

"I wish I didn't. It's wonderful here, I could stay forever." A few hours ago she had been counting the hours to her departure, he thought.

"Suppose we do—shall we?"

She frowned a little, perhaps because of the eagerness in his voice.

"No," she said coldly—"I'm going away to-morrow."

"Not to-morrow," he argued, "you gave in about the Eggishorn."

"Did I?" She laughed, low and sweet, it was like a ripple of happiness. She looked round at him. "It must be splendid to write about philosophy," she said suddenly.

"Well, hardly that; unfortunately most people find it dull to read." They went on in silence again, a stone evidently hurt her, for she started, then stopped and made a little sound of pain. "I have come out in thin shoes," she said. Instinctively he put out an arm, but she drew back before it could reach her. There was one of the usual convenient seats beside the pathway, backed by high rocks, gaunt and desolate-looking with the suggestion of primitive things that fascinated her. She sat down; for a minute or two she seemed to forget him.

"I want to take it all in," she said at last, "I never came abroad before, and everything is wonderful to me."

He stood, looking at her in silence with his back against a wall of rock, for she had evidently not expected him to sit too: she had a curious power of putting a sense of distance between them, across which it was impossible to reach. The twilight deepened, they could almost feel the shadows gathering, an enchantment seemed to be coming with them. She looked as if she knew, as if she waited for something far off to return.

"I wonder who you are?" he said. The words escaped him.

"Who I am?" She looked up and answered quickly, "Why, I'm nobody."

"I wish I knew about you, I feel as if you were made for something uncommon."

She was amused, a smile flickered in her eyes. "Well, at present," she said with the frankness which was one of her chief characteristics, "I have a typewriting office near Westbourne Grove."

It gave him almost a shock, though he hardly showed it at all.

"How did that come about?"

"There were three of us at home, I wanted to get away."

The atmosphere had changed in a moment, any sense of enchantment had vanished altogether, they were at the mercy of human facts; but perhaps they were as dangerous.

"You—at the head of an office?"

"Yes, my own office—I invented it."

"Are you there all by yourself?"

"No, I have two clerks and an idiot."

"An idiot!"

"She is the pupil, but I call her that because she can't spell—or do anything else, as a matter of fact—it's rather horrid of me, for she's ill now and at home with her mother."

"And the clerks?" He was too bewildered by this sudden descent to do anything but ask questions.

"One is at Yarmouth for her holiday, and the other is in charge of the office."

"Do you live there?"

"No, I go home before dinner and I come away after breakfast in the morning. It's splendid!" He always liked the expression with which she looked up and said the word. "You feel as if you have a right to live when you do some work." She got up and turned toward the hotel again.

"I knew you were a fine creature," he said—almost fervently.

She disliked being called a creature, even a fine one. "I don't see anything fine in it," she answered. "I told you I was nobody and I am."

"You are much more somebody than I thought." They trudged on in silence.

The night gathered closer, intensifying the whiteness of the snow beyond. There seemed to be something at stake between them, something held in the balance; in-

sensibly they knew it, but neither could tell which way it would go.

The hotel came in sight, there were lights here and there in the windows.

"It's getting late," she said. "I wonder what they think—if they noticed."

"Again—what does it matter?" He stopped and faced her. She looked back at him bravely, but half afraid.

"Everything matters to a woman."

"And to a man," he answered, as if against his will, "when he meets a woman like you."

"Oh! Don't," she said, almost as if she were afraid, and then under her breath she added, "I wonder what you think of me?"

"I think you adorable," he said it with all his heart.

They stopped at the door of the hotel. "I shall stay out a little longer—to-morrow we shall meet," his voice trembled a little.

She gave a little nod of assent and he turned away. She looked after him till he had vanished in the dimness. There was a seat outside the door, she pulled the white wrap closer round her and sat down. A tall woman, a certain Mrs. Streatly—one of the cats, Geraldine had called her—came to the door and looked up at the sky.

"I never understand why you like these cold places," she said to some one who was evidently behind. "The sky looks as if it might be frosty."

"The stars are wonderful," a girl's voice said.

Geraldine, her heart full of a strange happiness, got up to go in. She wanted to be alone, to dream of to-morrow. Mrs. Streatly's tall figure filled the doorway. "Is Mr. Wootten an old friend of yours?" she asked, looking at her as if she were an inferior.

"Mr. Wootten?" Geraldine resented the voice and the manner, and she was taken aback and looked bewildered for a moment. Of course she meant the stranger. "Oh, yes—he is a friend of mine. Do you know him?"

"No, but I've seen him before; his wife serves on a committee with me."

"His wife does—" She felt as if snow from the highest peak were being laid on her heart.

Mrs. Streatly looked at her sharply. "You know her too, I suppose?"

"Yes, of course." Geraldine was always thankful she had lied. "Please may I pass." She held her head erect as she entered the hotel; but she felt like a hunted woman.

"Perhaps he came here to meet her," Mrs. Streatly thought. "I knew there was something curious about her."

Geraldine sat for an hour in her room in the dark, facing things squarely. But there was only one thing to do, and she meant to do it. She crawled down to the Bureau, luckily no one was there to listen. "I want to go away very early to-morrow morning," she said. "To catch the nine o'clock train from Brigue, how long will it take to get there?"

"You oughtn't to start later than a quarter to six," the clerk said.

"That will do—I shall be ready."

"The mule that brought that gentleman up is going down soon after five."

"It can take my luggage. Is any one else going away early?"

"Not that I know of."

"Thank heaven!" she thought and went slowly upstairs. She stood by the window and had it out with herself, clasping her hands at the back of her neck. "Oh," she said with a little moan, "I could die—and like it."

Then she packed her pilgrim basket.

V

THE way down seemed endless and the stones were dreadful. She had not felt them nearly so much going up; but she had not been so tired then; now she was worn out. And she was so cold, a little icy breeze seemed to follow her, it put pain into head and throat; but she strode on: she wanted to get away from the snow, it was her great chance of forgetting.

She wasn't unhappy, she was only indignant, and desperately angry. Yet after all he hadn't done anything very dreadful, he hadn't said anything to resent—except that she was adorable. In her heart she heard his voice again. It thrilled her, and for a moment she told herself that it was true, it must be, she felt it, knew it. He couldn't have pretended so well, she didn't believe that any man could. But it wasn't fair to

the other woman—to his wife—not that she would ever know anything, of course. It was she, Geraldine, who was insulted and—and—no, no, she didn't care, she wouldn't. But he was the sort of man she liked, she couldn't help it, she did—she did—he was so tall and fair and quiet and he didn't talk too much. She loved his leisurely air, the suspicion of shambling in his gait, the look in his eyes, and she could have sworn—but no, all the time he had a wife at home, or somewhere, heaven knew where. She would never see him again. She felt so cheapened and insulted. She wished she hadn't told him about the office; but it wasn't that, it wasn't that at all, he had seemed to like her better for it. It was after knowing about it that he had grown so tender. It was lucky she hadn't told him precisely where the office was or he might have looked for it, and she could never bear to see him again—and yet it would be dreadful never—never to do so. She was a fool—"Oh, Geraldine Lawton, you are a fool," she said to herself. "He's the sort of man I should have liked to be friends with—but it never does. It's no good if a man's married, besides I hate the thought of her so—I wonder what she's like—if she's pretty?" She remembered her own face in the glass last night, she had felt a little proud of herself as she entered the dining-room; she knew that he had been taken a little by surprise, and she was certain that he had liked her; it had looked out of his eyes, it had been in his voice. Perhaps his wife was horrid or didn't care for him, but it was no good, she existed, and there was an end of it.

If only that stupid mule-boy wouldn't stop so often, she thought. He insisted on eating his breakfast at one point—a hunk of dry bread and a bit of hard cheese. He said the mule was tired and must wait—all stories of course—mules didn't get tired going down: besides if it did, what then? She was tired. No one in the world could be as tired as she was. She hadn't slept all night, had got up so early, the coffee had been disgusting and tasted of burnt wood, she had had nothing at all to eat; and yet she could go on, why couldn't the stupid mule-boy? She wondered what time he—there was only one he in the world—would get up. If he would look for her at breakfast and wonder why she was so late? Of

course he would ask at last. Then he would hear that she had gone hours before—so it would be no good trying to catch her up. He wouldn't know that she had heard who he was. He would think she didn't care to go to the Eggishorn, that she had changed her mind; that was what she wanted him to think. That horrid Mrs. Streatly would tell the other people;—and they would think—but what did it matter what they thought? She would never see them again, and she was thankful, thankful that she hadn't known them.

"If you would only hurry," she said, turning suddenly upon the mule-boy. They were nearly down but they seemed to have been hours; and she had forgotten to wind up her watch and didn't know the time. Suddenly there was a noise in the distance beyond, a rumbling that came nearer and nearer—it was the train that she had meant to go by from the Brigue station below. It was too late to catch it. She turned to the boy, but her French was not equal to heap the wrath she desired upon his unkempt head; and the mule, with her pilgrim basket and the hold-all, jogged on considering every step it took.

Brigue at last and the mule-boy dismissed.

She stood beside her luggage at the station and heard to her relief that, though the express had gone, there was a slow train in a couple of hours time. Then Geraldine's youth and healthy appetite asserted themselves. "I hate him," she said with a sigh, "and there's an end of that, and I'll go and have some breakfast."

There were little tables outside the door of the hotel opposite the station; she sat down and consoled herself with coffee and an omelette. She thought of the omelette at Clarens and snorted a little. "I couldn't have believed he was married—he didn't look it," she thought.

She felt much better when she had breakfasted. She wondered what she would do with herself next, there was the month's holiday to be finished. She didn't want to go far afield, she "couldn't run to it," and nothing should make her go tamely home. She must do something. Her tickets took her back to Clarens—she wasn't going to stop there—and via Lausanne to England. She thought of the two black beetles and decided not to stay at Lausanne again,

though there were other hotels, of course. "A woman's no good alone," she said to herself, and then indignantly denied it. "Yes, she is. She is much better alone, men are horrid."

She had still an hour to wait before the train started. She determined to go for a walk. Then suddenly there was the excitement of the diligence for the Simplon Pass—for all this occurred three years ago and the tunnel was not finished. She saw it made ready and the passengers take their places and depart. It would have been splendid to go too, she told herself—without the fervor with which she would have said it yesterday—but it was impossible, for funds had to be considered. She remembered a little picturesque hotel near Chillon, right down at the edge of the lake—she had stopped to look at it on her way to the castle. There was a willow tree in the garden—which went down to the water's edge—and a virginia creeper turning red ran up the side of the house. She would go and try to stay there. It would be very quiet and—"No, thank you, no more promiscuous acquaintances for me," but she would take long, lovely walks. If she still hated him enough, she would go up to Glion again and walk back by the Gorge du Chaudron—it had looked so beautiful. Then suddenly she remembered that her letters would go on to Bel Alp, if she didn't intercept them at Brigue. She hurried to the post-office, for she had only a quarter of an hour left now, and after some delay came away with a couple in her hand. She read one as she walked back to the station. It made her heart ache and all thoughts of self vanished: she saw a poor little genteel home at Shepherd's Bush and a woman crying—oh, it was dreadful! What could be done?

"I'm glad I've found you—to say good-bye at any rate." This was in the station.

She looked up, the fair man was standing beside her. Geraldine pulled herself together, but words were difficult—she was taken by surprise and the news in her letter had put a sob in her throat.

"Why did you go away so early?"

"I had arranged it yesterday afternoon."

"Yes—but last night you promised to go to the Eggishorn!"

"I didn't want to," she managed to give a brave little smile; "I changed my mind."



JAMES HUNTER'S FIGURE

"Couldn't we pretend to be old acquaintances?"—Page 232.

"I was so surprised when I found you had gone."

"I thought you wouldn't hear it till breakfast time."

"I didn't. I ran nearly all the way down, I was afraid you might have gone by the express."

"I lost it." She scrunched the letter in her hand and tried to keep her thoughts away from him, to make herself answer mechanically.

He looked at her puzzled.

She allowed herself to ask him a question: "Are you going back?"

"Why, yes. I just bolted when I heard you'd gone, but I left an unpaid bill and two open bags behind me."

She made no reply, she was watching the empty train. It would start in a few minutes; she was longing for the doors to be unlocked so that she might get safely into a carriage.

"Tell me why you are going in such a hurry?" he said, looking down at her. She was pale and very sweet, he thought, and her lips were quivering a little.

"I didn't want to stay," she answered, in a low voice.

He noticed the letter scrunched in her hand.

"Have you had bad news?"

"Yes."

"You didn't get the letters up there?"

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"No, I went for them to the post-office." She opened her hand a little showing the opened letter. "It has upset me so—the idiot is dead—" and she burst into tears.

"The idiot!" He stared at her.

"I oughtn't to call her that now—and I only did it to myself—and you. She was the only one her mother had—her name was Sophia—and Sophia's dead—she's dead, I must go back——"

"Do you know her mother?"

"I never saw her, but she'll want some one to comfort her. She's dreadfully poor." Geraldine quickly dabbed her eyes and tried to keep a brave face. He felt his heart go out to her—he knew a score of women who wouldn't have cared if an asylumful of idiots had died, he thought. She tried to excuse herself.

"I feel such a brute—but I had no idea she was so ill."

They were unlocking the carriage doors. Geraldine collected her pilgrim basket and her hold-all. He took them from her, but she stood ready for departure.

"That's not why you ran away—if you've only just had the letters?"

"No," she said, as she went toward the carriage. There were hardly any passengers, they had all gone by the express. "I had other reasons," she added with a little air of perversity. "I wanted to go—Well good-bye, Mr. Wootten——"



JAMES HAMILTON FRAGO

"I'm glad I've found you—to say good-bye at any rate," a voice said.—Page 236.

"Wootten—who's he?"

"It's you, isn't it?"

He looked up. "Not that I'm aware of."

"Mrs. Streatly said it was—that tall woman."

"I don't know the lady, but she lied anyway."

Geraldine put her hand on the handle of the open door and felt a little unsteady.

"She said she knew your wife."

"Well, I don't."

"You are not married?"

"Not yet."

She looked at him and laughed a little.

"Then what did it mean? She said that she served on a committee with your wife."

"She took me for someone else, I expect."

"How absurd!" The whole expression of her face had changed. "But I must go." She was in the carriage and the train was all but starting. "I was very stupid," she said regretfully.

In a moment he had jumped in and closed the door.

"Oh, but you mustn't come," she said.

"Mayn't I?"

"Think of the unpaid bill and the open bags!"

There was the sound of a horn—the train started.

"They can wait till this evening."

"Are you sure you are not Mr. Woot-

ten?" she asked, with a little laugh. She was ashamed at feeling so happy with that letter in her hand.

"I've every reason to think so." He pulled some letters from his pocket and showed her the directions—George Courtfield, Esqre. "I've some reason to believe that that's my name," he said. "And look—it's rather rough to have to prove one's identity, isn't it?" He opened a pocketbook and showed her a card.

"It's a much nicer name than Wootten," she said.

"I wish you'd make it yours."

She was quite startled. "What do you mean?" she asked. The train was plodding on toward Visp; the empty carriage with the mountains on either side looking in on them made the situation a romance.

"What I mean is this," he said looking down at her. "That I think you're the sweetest thing in womankind I ever came across. I don't know anything about you except what you've told me; but yet I know everything, and above all I know this—that I love you. You caught me in the moment you looked back at Glion. Do you remember?"

"Oh——"

"You don't know anything about me, you evidently didn't even know my name, and I don't know yours yet. I may be a ruffian or a scoundrel——"

"I'm certain you're not."

"Or a loafer—or a cheesemonger——"

"You said you were in a Government office and wrote philosophy——" She was making time.

"And I haven't many of this world's goods——"

"I don't care a bit about money."

"—But if you could care about me, I should be the happiest man alive, for I love you—if we have only met two or three times I have thought of you ever since that first day—and of nothing else."

"Oh, but——"

"If I'm an ass and a fool, tell me, and I'll get out at the next station—but if you could care——"

"I believe I do," said Geraldine—in a whisper.

"Then say you'll marry me. It would be splendid." He made a little triumphant sound, for he knew he was safe.

"I will," said Geraldine—and she did.



"If I'm an ass and a fool, tell me."